



"VARIETY IN HUNTING AND FISHING"

**NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT**

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From: Randy Kreil

Re: Last year's memo on Nov.  
pheasant opener.

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Dean Hildebrand and Roger Rostvet

**FROM:** Randy Kreil

**RE:** Opening Day for Pheasant Season

**DATE:** February 15, 2000 (Updated Version of January Memo)

I am not surprised this issue came up and was fully expecting some people, such as those with vested commercial interests, to request an earlier opener for pheasants. Even as we looked at opening dates for 2000 in preparation for the fall advisory board meetings and development of the proclamation and lottery schedule, it became apparent that 2000 was one of those years where openers were the latest they could be in the calendar cycle. All seasons are effected in this way including deer season, which opens the 10th of November and extends over Thanksgiving.

The bottom line question is: Should the pheasant opener remain the second Saturday of October (where it has been since 1990 when it was changed from the third Saturday in October) or should the opener be moved to October 7th, the first Saturday in October? On the surface, it appears that adding another week to the pheasant season would be a positive by providing more recreational opportunity. However, there are some negative implications and unintended consequences that we should be aware of and analyze. The following are some factors, in no particular order, that we should consider prior to determining the Department's recommendation to the Governor:

\* The final date for this decision is the 20th of July when the proclamation is scheduled to be to the Governor. However, we should try and resolve this issue with the Governor's office well in advance of the deadline date so there are no surprises and people can have time to adjust and plan.

\* All department calenders distributed to staff and more importantly to the public and landowners identify October 14th as the pheasant opener. A change would undoubtedly cause some confusion.

- \* For the past several months, department information and licensing staff have been telling callers the probable opener will be the 14th. Changing now will cause confusion and problems with people who may have already planned vacations, made reservations, and travel plans etc. Contacting all these people with different information will be challenging at best.
- \* The North Dakota State Tourism Guide, which lists the probable opening date for pheasant season as October 14th, has been printed and widely distributed to government offices, local chambers of commerce and tourism departments, and many private businesses. This too, may add a degree of confusion for the public, businesses, and private landowners.
- \* The option for an October 7th opener was not even mentioned as a possibility at the fall advisory board meetings. However, we could include the pheasant opening date for discussion at the spring meetings which would allow the public and private landowners to voice their opinions on the issue.
- \* North Dakota already has the earliest pheasant opening date (second Saturday of October) of any state in the upper Midwest or Northern Great Plains. Montana will also be opening on the 14th of October this year. An added complication is that we also have the latest hatching dates due to our northern latitude and late winter conditions.
- \* Is there a dangerous precedent being set by moving a hunting season opening date at the request and for the benefit of commercial fee hunting operations? We have frequently heard from the public at advisory board meetings and elsewhere there is an increasing concern over the influence and attention that commercial hunting businesses are receiving. Many people are familiar with Montana and the influence guides and outfitters have on hunting and fishing in that state and are not excited about a similar situation occurring here.
- \* Moving the pheasant opener to the first Saturday in October will conflict with the waterfowl opener in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009, and 2010. We have always avoided this conflict in the past and it may be advisable to continue different opening dates in the future. The wardens have some serious concerns over having two major hunting seasons occurring on the same day. Their ability to handle the volume of hunters and possible complaints are a legitimate concern. The chances of moving the waterfowl opener into mid-September remains in doubt and will take a major change attitude by the FWS and other flyways.
- \* The maturity of birds with an earlier opening date is a concern to our biologists and some enforcement staff. Others may not agree this is an issue, but we do have experienced staff members who sincerely believe this is a legitimate concern. Many broods are not full grown and roosters are not adequately colored out thereby making identification for hunters more difficult. The result will be hunters either shooting young hens and leaving them lay or becoming frustrated over the inability to identify their targets. We need to remember that North Dakota hunters are "opening day" hunters. Many people only hunt pheasants the first weekend or two, before many of the birds will be colored out if we open on the 7th.

\* An early October opener could create problems with hunters and landowners in areas where large acreage of sunflowers and corn will still be standing. By opening the season after the harvest of these crops is well underway, the possible conflicts could be minimized. As it is now, we have an area that has a delayed opener for these very reasons (Yellowstone Bottoms area in McKenzie and Williams Counties). This delayed season came about when Russ Stuart was Commissioner and landowners had serious concerns over conflicts and safety relating to hunters and farmers on the area's narrow roads during sugar beet harvest. Going to an earlier opener may result in a negative response from landowners in other areas of the state, some of which already believe hunting seasons are too long.

\* There is a concern that landowners may not be interested in having pheasant season open for an additional week in October. We do hear from some landowners that hunting seasons are too long as it is. In an ironic twist, the letters requesting the Governor move the date forward to the 7th are from essentially the same part of the state (and in some cases the same people) who were so upset with "hunter damage" to their roads they requested a \$39,000 payment from the department for road repair. In addition they promoted legislation in the last session to compensate landowners and local government entities for damage caused by hunters.

\* Having the season open the 7th of October will conflict with the opening weekend of pronghorn antelope season. This will cause at least two possible problems. First, the primary pheasant range generally overlaps with antelope hunting areas which creates a difficult situation for our law enforcement personnel. The number of hunters and volume of possible landowner complaints will cause problems for the wardens in southwest ND. Second, there may be problems between opening weekend pheasant and antelope hunters who are hunting in the same areas.